

1 CHAIRMAN JAMES: Mayor Short?

2 MAYOR SHORT: Thank you very much. First of all, let
3 me welcome you to the Mississippi Gulf Coast. It's a pleasure to
4 have you here. Before the last 14 years, I was a member of the
5 House of Representatives. I've been a member -- mayor of
6 Gulfport for the past year so I have been on both sides of this
7 issue.

8 I also like to give credit where credit is due.
9 Yesterday I was in charge of the weather; today Mayor Holloway's
10 in charge of the weather on the Gulf Coast.

11 Let me start by taking you back to 1992 and tell you
12 about the economy in the City of Gulfport. Our businesses were
13 closing. The ones that was staying open was hoping that gaming
14 would come along. We had a 7 percent unemployment rate. There
15 was very few jobs that had good insurance packages, health
16 benefits or both members of the family working. This is all
17 before gaming.

18 Now let's look at 1998. The economy in Gulfport on
19 the Mississippi Gulf Coast is as strong as it's ever been in our
20 history. In Gulfport, every month we have approximately 200
21 businesses with building permits and 200 residential building
22 permits.

23 We've had our first large apartment complex that was
24 built in the last ten years. More people are employed now than
25 ever before. As these gentlemen have said before, if you don't
26 have a job now it's because you don't want to work.

27 Our city taxes -- our tax increase of sales tax has
28 more than doubled. We're approximately a million dollars a month

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1 right now, and this is also because of the gaming industry and
2 the draw.

3 Before I go on to some other things in the gaming, I
4 want to tell you something that the gaming families has done when
5 they've moved to the coast, and when I say families, I'm talking
6 about the people who work at the casinos. And I'm going to use
7 one example out of many, the Special Olympics, which I have been
8 involved in for 29 years.

9 We have casinos who take their employees, and when we
10 have our state games and our area games, they develop what's
11 called Olympic villages. They bring out gifts and toys for our
12 kids. They man these games for my Special Olympic kids that come
13 here, 2500 in the month of May.

14 If I have my very special fishing rodeo, another
15 casino furnishes all the food. Now, they give money, but money
16 is not the most important part. It is the type of people that
17 they have working here that get involved with our community and
18 with the people that come down from our state. So they are very
19 good corporate citizens and we are very pleased to have them.

20 Now, I'd like to talk to you a little bit about some
21 false information that's come out about crime. Sure, you see
22 some crimes rates that's going up in our city but let me tell you
23 the things that you probably don't read, is that we had an
24 annexation in Gulfport that doubled the size of my city.

25 We have millions of new tourists that come to town
26 now that we did not have before. So we basically have the same
27 type of problems that they have in Orlando and other major cities
28 where you have a tremendous amount of growth.

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1 You're going to have more crime but it's not related
2 indirectly because of the gaming industry; it's because of more
3 and more people coming in. So I want you to remember that when
4 you look at statistics, look at both sides of the statistics of
5 the numbers because of the number of people we have here now.

6 We've been able to add more police department and our
7 police in our departments so naturally they're out more often.
8 But the casinos have not brought an increase of crime anymore
9 than what has happened in Disneyworld or other areas where you've
10 had a large number of growth.

11 Another thing I want to talk to you about is the
12 problem gambler. I know that you all hear about this. You
13 listen and say, we've got to do something. These people suffer
14 from addictions and we know that, but people also suffer from
15 addictions from alcohol, tobacco, food and computer Internet.

16 Very seldom do you see an industry like the gaming
17 industry who helps fund programs to help these people. They
18 can't do it by themselves. We have to have people in our
19 churches. We have to have people in our civic organizations that
20 try to help. But the gaming industry is putting money in here,
21 trying to solve or help solve this problem.

22 They don't get rich off of an addicted gambler so
23 they have looked at this problem and they are working very hard
24 to try to solve this problem. And also, those with addictions
25 must try to help themselves. We can't do this by ourselves in
26 this industry. So they are working to do that and we're proud of
27 that.

28 In closing, I want to take the opportunity to thank
29 you today. The gaming industry has reshaped the future of my

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1 city, our counties throughout the state. Many of our residents
2 wake up every morning, knowing that our city, our state, now
3 offers career and social opportunities far beyond what we had
4 before.

5 I can tell you as a member of the Mississippi House
6 of Representatives when this was passed, no one ever had the idea
7 that Mississippi would grow and we would reach the type of
8 economic boons that we have.

9 It's because we had legislators who looked at laws
10 from other areas of the country who had gaming and we wanted to
11 make it strict; we wanted to try to do what was right. And
12 because we have got the type of gaming industry to come into our
13 cities that want to also make it right.

14 They're not the answer but they were the spark plug.
15 They're what's opened up to give us more opportunities to go out
16 and bring in other industries and to help the citizens of our
17 state and our city who we represent. Again, thank you for giving
18 me this opportunity.

19 CHAIRMAN JAMES: Thank you, Mayor Short.

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